

Exclusives follow interview scoop

Paper gets White House plums

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Surveying their Sunday Washington Star-News this week subscribers found two big White House news exclusives leading the paper: "Nixon will bypass legislative route in reorganization," and, right under it, "Federal tax on sales ruled out by Nixon."

Both stories gave internal evidence of a purposeful White House leak to the solid, conservative Star, a hitherto rather stogy home-town paper.

The Star (recently married to the old tabloid, the News) has one big asset in the eyes of the administration — it supports Mr. Nixon. Its bitterly resented rival paper, the Washington Post, doesn't.

More exclusives

The White House exclusives in the Sunday Star were follow-ups to an even more spectacular scoop; a one-hour interview with President Nixon with Star-News reporter Garnett D. Horner, on what Mr. Nixon plans for the next four years.

In full confidence of a landslide, Mr. Nixon disclosed his thoughts to the reporter on Sunday, Nov. 5, at San Clemente for publication Nov. 9, two days after the election.

The New York Times reprinted the text of the extraordinarily revealing interview in full and it has been the subject of syndicated columnists ever since.

The Star-News got several spin-offs from the Horner interview like the story, Nov. 10, "Nixon to press for big property tax cuts," which turned out to be an interview with John D. Ehrlichman, Assistant to the President on Domestic Affairs. Mr. Nixon hopes to complete the plan by the end of his second term, the story said.

Mr. Nixon's relations with the press have passed through several phases; at first there were press conferences which now have become so infrequent as almost to have lapsed. There was Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew's attack on the news media which seemed directed particularly at the Columbia Broadcasting System.

With publication of the Pentagon papers, the White House seemed to narrow in on the New York Times and the Washington Post, and most recently, with the Watergate affair, on the Post as top of its most unloved list.

The Washington Post and CBS were "unconscionable" in handling the Watergate disclosures, Charles W. Colson, special counsel to Mr. Nixon, told the New England Society of Newspaper Editors Nov. 12, and he accused them of "McCarthyism." He singled out Benjamin Bradlee, executive editor of the Post, as "self-appointed leader of the

fringe of arrogant elitists."

Mr. Bradlee said ho-hum. Wait till the Senate starts its January Watergate investigation, he seemed to say.

The Washington Post (morning) has been making money; The Washington Star (evening and Sunday) and the tabloid Washington News (evening) lost money.

In July, the latter two combined and circulation and advertising of the Star-News have been picking up. There are also signs of new vigor in the Sunday paper which is in direct morning competition with the Post. The Post's weekday circulation 519,800; Star-News 415,900.

Now the White House appears to have opened its second line of attack. It is giving the Star-News friendly priority in interviews and exclusives. In a city devoted to politics this is a powerful asset.

Whether it's just a sudden love affair out of pique at a rival or a permanent alliance remains to be seen. It has appeared that the White House did not love The Star-News more, but The Post less. The liberal Post has battered the Nixon administration mercilessly, but it did not give specific pre-election endorsement.

The Star-News specifically endorsed Mr. Nixon, but in terms somewhat less than fervid: It declared Oct. 29 that the President is "not a lovable person; he does not come across as a man of great principle or substantial character."

The paper seems unlikely to become the administration organ in Washington as some papers did here in the 19th century. Most of them did not last long.

Sometimes, through the years, presidents have picked out particular reporters as favorites, rather than newspapers. For example: Theodore Roosevelt — Edward Bok, Ladies Home Journal; William Howard Taft — Gus Karger, Cincinnati Times-Star; Woodrow Wilson — David Lawrence; Herbert Hoover — Mark Sullivan (in "Medicine Ball Cabinet"); Harding — George Harvey, North American Review; FDR — exclusive interviews with George Creel, Colliers, and Anne O'Hare McCormick and Arthur Krock, both of the New York Times; Harry S. Truman — Charles Ross, St. Louis Post Dispatch; John F. Kennedy — included Ben Bradlee (News Week), Charles Bartlett, and others; Lyndon B. Johnson — columnist William White and others.

Now enters veteran White House reporter Garnett (Jack) Horner, of the Star-News, gray, quiet, factual, calling his interview with Mr. Nixon "the high point of 45 years in the newspaper world."

No favorite, says the White House. It says however, it has given seven previous interviews on the record: four to TV networks, one each to the New York Times, Time, and the London Sunday Telegraph. In timing and content, however, the Horner interview stands almost alone.